



**SOUTH FLORIDA
PRESCHOOL PTA, INC.**

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MM Docket 93-48

June 14, 1996

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
1919 M St., NW
Washington, DC 20554

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Dear Chairman Hundt and Commissioners:

The South Florida Preschool PTA (SFPPTA), an organization for parents and educators of young children from infancy to age five, has completed its 1996 television monitoring report


The report contains our findings in regard to Miami television stations' compliance with the Children's Television Monitoring Act of 1990. It also contains our recommendations for improving the quality of, and decreasing the violence in, children's television programming.

The effects of television violence on children has been proven through studies, some of which are quoted in our report, and unfortunately turning off the television is not enough. Children who do not watch television are still exposed to children who do and whose behavior is affected by what they watch. Broadcasters need to start acting responsibly toward the nation's children instead of viewing them merely as a way to lure advertising dollars to the stations

The saying "violence sells" should not include impressionable children who will become our future citizens

If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please contact me at (305) 669-4742.

Sincerely,


Jennifer Wollmann

Enclosure

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**A REPORT ON MIAMI TELEVISION
STATIONS' COMPLIANCE
WITH THE CHILDREN'S TELEVISION ACT OF 1990**

**Submitted by
South Florida Preschool PTA
Miami, Florida**

**Prepared by
Jennifer Wollmann, Vice President
and Legislative Chair**

Lorri Guastella, Television Monitoring Chair

June 11, 1996

In continuing with the National PTA's priority to improve the quality of children's television programming, members of the South Florida Preschool PTA monitored stations in the Miami area for the fourth consecutive year. The purpose of the monitoring is to determine if the stations are in compliance with the terms of the Children's Television Act of 1990.

This year's congressional budget cuts to PBS stations, coupled with the fact that Florida stations are up for review and relicensing by the FCC in February 1997, made this year's findings especially significant.

The findings reported in last year's monitoring report have not notably changed. In summary, last year's report stated that 1) Miami area commercial television stations are not adequately serving the educational needs of children; 2) Social-themed entertainment programs are being classified as educational to meet the law's programming requirement; 3) PBS stations are committed to quality educational programming; 4) Public Service Announcements are being used to fulfill the educational/informational requirements of the law; 5) Most commercial stations do not air locally produced programs designed to serve the educational/informational needs of children; 6) Stations claim nonbroadcast efforts to satisfy the Act; 7) Stations operate within commercial limits guideline set by the Act; and 8) Cartoons shown during children's programming are extremely violent.¹

Due to the fact that the issues listed above have not changed significantly, this year's report will only re-address item number eight above and will include some new findings.

MONITORING

Individual members of the SFPPTA monitored programming on five major and two local public airwave stations that are aired in the Miami area: Channels 4 (WFOR/CBS owned), 6 (WTVJ/NBC owned), 7 (WSVN/Fox affiliate), 10 (WPLG/ABC affiliate), 17 (WLRN/PBS), 33 (WBFS/UPN), 39 (WDZL). These stations have signals that are of sufficient strength that any home with a television in the Miami area receives them.

Cable stations were not monitored because 1) programming review requirements required by the Act do not apply to cable, or noncommercial, stations and 2) with its content, including its educational/informational children's programming, patrons can cancel their subscriptions.

The legislative committee chair reviewed the program schedules for the above stations for a one week period beginning Monday, March 18, 1996. Programs whose content was clearly not meant for children's viewing were eliminated and the remaining time slots were monitored by SFPPTA members, who signed up to watch one (1) hour blocks of television. All programs were monitored by two members to assure agreement of program classification. During each program, members ascertained:

- 1) if the program was a children's program;
- 2) if so, was it educational or informational;
- 3) the program's violence content (i.e. physical threat, physical striking, person/animal killed);
- 4) the number of commercials aired (these were timed and recorded) and;
- 5) products advertised.

Members were also encouraged to comment on the content of the programs they viewed.

FINDINGS

The findings of the South Florida Preschool PTA's 1995 - 1996 television monitoring are slightly positive yet still disturbing.

On the positive side, we found that one network was making an attempt to revive the "family hour" one day a week and most stations are providing some, albeit minimal, educational programming. Our members were pleasantly surprised when they watched a local station known for violent programming and instead of violence were entertained and informed with educational television aimed at children.

Several factors contribute to these results, namely the concerns voiced by parents and child advocacy groups, the increasing number of cable subscribers, reflecting a search for "better" television, and the purchase of ABC by Disney. The SFPPTA believes that if Disney is committed to providing quality family entertainment and children's programming, they can have a positive impact on current programming. We also realize the potential for the station to become a marketing tool for Disney merchandise and vacations and will be monitoring their programming in the future.

Although there are some positive signs that children's programming may be improving, there is still a need to increase the quality and decrease the violence in children's television. All SFPPTA findings are included in Appendices A and B.

1) Non-educational programs aimed at children under the age of eight are the most violent.

The findings regarding the violence in programming aimed at the younger target audiences, those eight and under, were particularly disturbing. The SFPPTA found an average of 21 violent acts per hour for this age group compared with a total of 8 violent acts on programming for audiences over 9 years old. The most violence, 22 acts per hour, occurred in the 3-5 year old target audience category.

Although a lot of the violence occurred in cartoons, 22 acts per hour in animated versus 5² acts in live action, and may therefore appear relatively harmless, which it might be in small doses, the violence includes more sophisticated weapons. Machine guns, bombs, and uzis are more prevalent than anvils falling on Coyote's head.

The realism of the violent acts within the cartoons, coupled with the saturation of violent programming and the fact that children watch an average of 22 hours of television per week,³ cannot be overlooked and considered as being harmless to children. Based on our findings, a child who watches 22 hours of television per week will be exposed to 322 violent acts!

Researchers in a Pennsylvania State University study of 100 preschool children found that the "...children who watched the violent cartoons were more likely to strike out at playmates, argue, and disobey class rules than those children who watched the nonviolent programs."⁴

Educational programming was found to be significantly less violent, 1 act per hour, than non-educational programming, 19 violent acts per hour. Twenty five percent of the shows viewed contained no violence. We monitored a total of 22.5 hours of television, only 6.5 of which were considered educational by our viewers. This finding alone indicates the importance of providing support for PBS stations.

2) Spot Commitment Programming

Another disturbing finding, in addition to the propensity of violent children's programming, was the proliferation of Power Ranger style shows. It was impossible for the South Florida Preschool PTA members to know which shows we monitored, if any, were "spot commitments", shows that are not purchased by broadcasters but rather aired in time purchased by the shows producers.

The lack of content of some of the shows did raise some speculation that, based on the marketing success of the Power Rangers, the use of "spot commitment" programming is on the rise. One show in particular fed off of the karate antics of the Power Rangers but took it several steps above in realism and violence.

The show was touted as a martial arts competition, which sounded like the premise for an educational show. Instead, it dealt with competitors being threatened by Ninjas as well as being challenged by a karate champion. The show was so aggressive and violent that it completely distorted the beliefs of most martial artists and basically marketed violence to an impressionable target audience. The number of violent and threatening acts were so numerous, well over 100, that they were not tabulated individually and therefore were not included in the figures used in the findings.

Although "(f)ederal rules prohibit toy companies from advertising show-related products during the show itself",⁵ this show was actively promoted as coming live from a studio at an amusement park and that amusement park was advertised during the commercial breaks.

3) Content of Advertisements

Broadcasters should be responsible in the advertisements they show during children's programming. In addition to eliminating the blatant instances like the one described above, they should show common sense in the messages they are sending to children. During a half hour show aimed at pre-teen and teenage girls, a weight loss program was shown twice. With anorexia and bulimia prevalent among this age group, the placing of these ads was inappropriate.

In summary, broadcasters are making an attempt to comply with the bare minimum of the Children's Television Act of 1990. They comply with the number of commercials allowed per hour, no more than 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays, as well as differentiating between commercials and the television program with the use of separators and bumpers. These are the parts of the Act that are clearly measurable and identifiable.

With regards to providing "programming that furthers the positive development of the child in any respect including the child's cognitive/intellectual or emotional/social needs" however, broadcasters are falling short of complying with the intent of the law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of our 1996 television monitoring findings, the South Florida Preschool PTA recommends the following:

- 1. The Children's Television Act should mandate a minimum number of hours of educational/informational children's programming.**
- 2. The FCC should amend the Children's Television Act to address and strictly limit the amount of violence shown in children's programs and in the advertisements aired during children's programming.**
- 3. The FCC should consider regulating the amount of air time producers of children's programs can buy from stations for the purpose of airing a show to market products. Known as "spot commitments" or "advertising support", these practices make it difficult for educational/informational children's programming to compete for air time since the majority of educational shows must be purchased by a broadcaster.**

The members of the SFPPTA acknowledge that television is a source of entertainment and that, with the exception of PBS and its affiliates, networks are in the business to make a profit. This report is not meant to suggest that all programming should be educational, but rather that broadcasters need to be responsible in the children's programs that they air and offer more educational and non-violent programming.

Appendix A

Viewing Schedule and Results

| <u>Day of Week</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Target Audience</u> | <u>Ave.# Violent Acts Viewed</u> | <u>Animated Live Action</u> | <u>Channel</u> | <u>Educ. Y/N</u> |
|--------------------|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Monday 3/18 | 2-3 PM | 3-8 yrs | 35.5 | Animated | 33 | N |
| Tuesday 3/19 | 3-4 PM | 3-12 yrs | 26.0 | Animated | 33 | N |
| | 3-4 PM | 3-8 yrs | 22.0 | Animated | 39 | N |
| | 5-6 PM | 9-16 yrs | 0 | Live Action | 33 | N |
| Wed. 3/20 | 4-4:30 PM | 3-8 yrs | 16.5 | Animated | 39 | N |
| | 4:30-5 PM | 3-8 yrs | 19.5 | Live Action | 39 | N |
| Friday 3/22 | 8-8:30 PM | 9-16 yrs | 8.0 | Live Action | 10 | N |
| | 8:30-9 PM | 3-8 yrs | 4.0 | Both | 10 | N |
| Sat. 3/23 | 7-7:30 AM | 13-16 yrs | 0 | Live Action | 4 | Y |
| | 7:30-8 AM | 2-12 yrs | 0 | Both | 4 | Y |
| | 7-7:30 AM | 6-12 yrs | 0 | Live Action | 10 | N |
| | 7:30-8 AM | 6-12 yrs | 0 | Live Action | 10 | Y |
| | 7-8 AM | 9-16 yrs | 1.0 | Live Action | 33 | N |
| | 7-8 AM | 6-16 yrs | 25.0 | Animated | 39 | N |
| | 8-9 AM | 3-5 yrs | 0 | Both | 17 | Y |
| | 8-8:30 AM | 3-8 yrs | 0 | Live Action | 33 | Y |
| | 8:30-9 AM | 3-8 yrs | 18.0 | Animated | 33 | N |
| | 8-8:30 AM | 9-12 yrs | 7.0 | Animated | 39 | Y |
| | 8:30-9 AM | 3-12 yrs | 18.0 | Animated | 39 | N |
| | 9-10 AM | 3-16 yrs | 0 | Animated | 17 | Y |

Viewing Schedule and Results

| <u>Day of Week</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Target Audience</u> | <u>Ave.# Violent Acts Viewed</u> | <u>Animated Live Action</u> | <u>Channel</u> | <u>Educ. Y/N</u> |
|--------------------|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Sat. 3/23 | 9-10 AM | 9-16 yrs | *100+ | Live Action | 33 | N |
| | 9-10 AM | 6-8 yrs | 0 | Live Action | 10 | N |
| | 9-10 AM | 6-8 yrs | 28.0 | Live Action | 39 | N |
| | 9-10 AM | 6-12 yrs | *72.0 | Animated | 4 | N |
| | 10-11 AM | 3-8 yrs | 56.0 | Animated | 39 | N |
| | 10-10:30 AM | 6-16 yrs | 1.0 | Live Action | 10 | N |
| | 10:30-11 AM | 3-16 yrs | 15.0 | Animated | 10 | N |
| | 10-11 AM | 9-16 yrs | 1.0 | Live Action | 7 | Y |
| | 10-11 AM | 9-16 yrs | 1.0 | Live Action | 6 | N |
| | 10-11 AM | 6-12 yrs | 11.0 | Animated | 4 | N |
| | 11-12 PM | 6-12 yrs | 1.0 | Live Action | 7 | Y |
| | 11-12 PM | 3-5 yrs | 15.0 | Animated | 10 | N |

Total number of violent acts viewed: 329.5/22.5 Total hours viewed = 14.64 violent acts/hr

* Due to the unreasonably high violence in these shows, these averages were not used for any of the calculations in this report. However, the fact that these shows do have such astronomical violence should not be discounted since they indicate that the overall level of violence in children's programming is high.

Appendix B

Violent Acts By Age Group

| Age | # Violent Acts Viewed | * # of Television Hours Viewed | Average By Age |
|------------|----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 3-5 yrs | 245.5 | 11.0 | 22.32 |
| 6-8 yrs | 296.5 | 15.5 | 19.13 |
| 9-12 yrs | 113.0 | 11.0 | 10.27 |
| 13-16 yrs | 44.0 | 7.0 | 6.29 |

* The total hours viewed in this category add up to more than the 22.5 total hours viewed because some shows targeted more than one age group. For example, if a one hour show targeted 3-12 year olds, it was counted once for each age group thereby resulting in being tabulated as three separate hours.

Violent Acts in Animated V.S. Live Action Programs

| Animated or Live Action | # Violent Acts Viewed | * # of Television Hours Viewed | Average |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Animated | 269.0 | 12.5 | 21.52 |
| Live Action | 64.5 | 12 | 5.38 |

* The total number of hours viewed in this category are two hours more than the 22.5 total hours viewed because some shows contained both live action and animation.

¹ A Report on Miami Television Station's Compliance With the Children's Television Act of 1990, South Florida Preschool PTA, May 25, 1995.

² One show that was monitored, and is discussed under Spot Commitment Programming in this document, contained over 100 violent acts and were not tallied or included in this figure. This number is therefore significantly higher.

³ A Parent's Guide to Kids' TV, Center for Media Education, 1995.

⁴ *What's the News About TV?*, Valerie Latona, Healthy Kids, February/March 1996.

⁵ *Controversial Cartoons*, Paul Farhi, Washington Post Service, The Miami Herald, February 21, 1996